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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR OURISMAN'S INTRODUCTORY MEETING WITH PM
ARTHUR

REF: A. 06 BRIDGETOWN 1904
[1](#)B. 06 BRIDGETOWN 1851
[1](#)C. 06 STATE 141592

Classified By: CDA Mary Ellen T. Gilroy for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: In a January 11 introductory meeting with Ambassador Mary Ourisman, Barbados' Prime Minister Owen Arthur assured the United States of his commitment to continue building a strong and warm bilateral relationship. PM Arthur and Ambassador Ourisman discussed trade, disaster risk management, regional integration, Cricket World Cup, training for the Barbados Defence Force, and the RSS C-26 aircraft. End Summary.

TRADE AND THE "LOU DOBBS" PROBLEM

[1](#)2. (SBU) Barbados' Prime Minister Owen Arthur kicked off his first official meeting with Ambassador Ourisman with words of friendship and assurances that he will continue working with the United States to achieve a relationship that is "warmer and warmer." He noted the upcoming June celebration of Caribbean Heritage Month in the United States and the opportunities that this event would present. Another area where PM Arthur thought much could be done was trade. The PM, who leads CARICOM's economic integration effort, the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME), told the Ambassador that the United States and CARICOM should lock in the benefits and progress made to date. Without discussing specifics, he noted that he already tried to use his December 6 speech to the Caribbean-Central America Action (CCAA) conference in Miami to spur a renewed dialogue on trade liberalization in the region. However, he noted that the climate for discussing free trade in the United States is no longer propitious because of the "Lou Dobbs" problem, referring to the CNN anchor's opposition to free trade agreements. PM Arthur also expressed a concern that the new Congress, under Democratic control, could be less supportive of trade agreements. Ambassador Ourisman assured the Prime Minister that the United States planned to assist the region in harmonizing the CSME and enhancing the region's trade competitiveness through the revived U.S.-CARICOM Trade and Investment Council (TIC) process.

DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT

[1](#)3. (SBU) Prime Minister Arthur noted that another area where the United States and Barbados could "establish common

ground" was disaster risk management, given that natural disasters, especially hurricanes, affect the Caribbean as well as many parts of the United States. (Note: PM Arthur and other Barbadian officials have raised this issue on a number of occasions, most recently during Ambassador Kramer's October farewell call on PM Arthur (ref A). End Note.) Stating that the insurance industry "has not done right by us," PM Arthur ventured that if the Caribbean region and southern states of the United States had a "serious engagement with the insurance industry," risk premiums for all could be lowered. PM Arthur also spoke of the need to pool the region's resources for disaster reconstruction. The Ambassador agreed that the Caribbean and the United States share many of the same challenges, but she urged the Prime Minister to look within the region for ways to improve disaster preparedness, including through improved and uniform building codes, such as those adopted in Florida and other U.S. states. PM Arthur agreed and noted his efforts to reform the building codes system in Barbados.

REGIONAL INTEGRATION: A "DELICATELY POISED" REGION

14. (SBU) In assessing the Caribbean region's integration efforts, Prime Minister Arthur sounded caution about the prospects for closer ties and described the region as "delicately poised." He viewed some CARICOM members as weakening in their commitment to regional integration and singled out Jamaica as a particular cause for concern because the country's opposition, which could win the next election, has been speaking out against further integration efforts. Jamaica's "30 years of intense involvement" in the region's integration process could hardly be replicated, according to PM Arthur. He said he also worries about regional fracturing, as some countries begin to seek closer

partnerships with other countries, especially the United States or Venezuela, as a substitute for closer intraregional ties. In response to his suggestion that the United States and others use their influence to support the region's integration efforts, the Deputy Chief of Mission assured PM Arthur that the United States supported CARICOM and the integration process but could not interfere with internal policies of member countries. The Prime Minister expressed appreciation for U.S. support to date, noting that the U.S. decision to work with the region on organizing a Caribbean conference in June 2007 was exactly what the region needed. "A series of bilats," he said, would not have helped the regional integration cause.

CRICKET WORLD CUP

15. (C) Prime Minister Arthur was equally appreciative of U.S. assistance with the region's security preparations for the March-April 2007 Cricket World Cup (CWC). He expressed hope that the CWC-related security cooperation would be the basis for future engagement on areas of security. Ambassador Ourisman acknowledged that Barbados has made great strides in its preparations and remains the only host country to have adopted the necessary implementing legislation for the Advance Passenger Information System (APIS). The Ambassador took this opportunity to raise with the Prime Minister two recent security incidents that have cast doubt on the state of Barbados' emergency preparedness and crisis response capacity (ref B). Both incidents demonstrated that Barbados' first responders and government officials did not follow established protocols when the Embassy called upon them to address potential security threats to the U.S. mission. PM Arthur, who had not been briefed on either incident, told Ambassador Ourisman that he would not take these issues lightly and planned to follow up with relevant officials.

TRAINING FOR BARBADOS DEFENCE FORCE

16. (C) Ambassador Ourisman also used the CWC discussion as an opportunity to inquire about what appeared to be a drop in

interest on the part of the Barbados Defence Force (BDF) in courses offered through the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program. PM Arthur responded that Barbados "made a judgment" following the U.S. cancellation of two training courses because of Barbadian opposition to signing an Article 98 agreement (NFI) that Barbados would no longer look to the United States for assistance with BDF training. Ambassador Ourisman noted that IMET training for the BDF would be useful for both Barbados and the United States and expressed hope that Barbados would review its position on this matter. PM Arthur responded positively and suggested another meeting with Ambassador Ourisman in the near future to discuss regional security issues in greater detail.

RSS AND C-26 AIRCRAFT

17. (C) PM Arthur told Ambassador Ourisman that he was looking to "regularize and make permanent" the arrangements concerning the two fixed-wing C-26 planes used for counternarcotics surveillance. He recalled his October 2006 discussion with then-Ambassador Kramer and his proposal to buy the two aircraft from the United States (ref A). Noting that most Regional Security System (RSS) members have fallen short in meeting their financial and other obligations to the security arrangement, including on funding the maintenance and operations of the C-26s, PM Arthur sought to explain why Barbados was considering options for building its own security capacity. Ambassador Ourisman later confirmed to PM Arthur that the two C-26s are, in fact, already the property of the Government of Barbados.

18. (C) According to PM Arthur, his government is also considering, in addition to the C-26s, purchasing helicopters and vessels to be used for surveillance, interdiction, and search and rescue. PM Arthur seems to be leaning toward a more "go it alone" approach when it comes to his country's security, since his RSS partners appear less than committed to building up the RSS's capacity. This indirect admission that regional integration has limits is very uncharacteristic for this committed regionalist.

COMMENT

19. (C) In her first official meeting with Prime Minister Arthur, Ambassador Ourisman had an opportunity to assess the improvement in U.S. bilateral relations with Barbados. Despite continuing disagreements on issues such as Article 98, our relationship has moved into a more pragmatic stage, thanks in large part to PM Arthur's efforts. The public vitriol of 2002 and 2003 has largely stopped, as the Prime Minister succeeded in muzzling some of the more strident opponents of U.S. policies in his administration, including Foreign Minister Dame Billie Miller. He has also proved to be a steadying presence in the region, promoting regional integration and remaining cautious about Venezuela and its influence over the Caribbean. Nevertheless, as his government's decision on IMET demonstrates, Barbados under PM Arthur does not easily forget and will remain prickly when it comes to defending what it sees as "principled" positions. That said, the Prime Minister's expression of interest in stronger security cooperation with the United States represents an important opportunity to develop closer ties with a country that will continue to be a regional leader.

OURISMAN